

Message Text

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21

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9714

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 04770

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, SA, UK

SUBJECT: BRITISH COMMENTS ON SITUATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

SUMMARY: WE CALLED ON WEIR, ASSISTANT SECRETARY AT THE
FCO, MARCH 27 TO SOLICIT HIS PRELIMINARY VIEWS ON THE
IMPLICATIONS OF THE ASSASSINATION OF KING FAISAL. HE
TOOK A CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF THE SITUATION IN
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SAUDI ARABIA. END SUMMARY

1. WEIR NOTED THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT LATE YESTERDAY, MARCH 26, SENT MINISTER OF DEFENSE MASON, AND SHADOW FOREIGN SECRETARY MAUDLING, TO RIYADH AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO CONVEY CONDOLENCES TO THE ROYAL FAMILY. WEIR UNDERSTOOD THAT THE FRENCH HAD ORIGINALLY NOT INTENDED TO SEND ANYONE TO SAUDI ARABIA SINCE THE SAUDIS HAD NOT SENT ANYONE TO THE FUNERAL OF POMPIDOU. GISCARD OVERRULED THIS DECISION, HOWEVER, AND THE FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTER WENT TO RIYADH.

2. WEIR WAS IMPRESSED BY THE SMOOTHNESS OF SUCCESSION OF POWER. HE AGREED WITH THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HERE THAT FAH'D WILL BE THE REAL POWER IN SAUDI ARABIA, BUT HE QUALIFIED THIS JUDGMENT SLIGHTLY BY SAYING THAT HE ALSO AGREED WITH THE UK AMBASSADOR IN JIDDA WHO HAD REPORTED THAT IT WAS CONCEIVABLE KHALID MIGHT ENJOY THE TASTE OF POWER AND SEEK TO RULE AS WELL AS REIGN. WEIR CONTINUED THAT HE HAD TALKED TO FAH'D A NUMBER OF TIMES IN THE PAST YEAR OR SO AND PERSONALLY THOUGHT HIM A LESS STRONG PERSONALITY THAN SOME PEOPLE HAVE MADE HIM OUT TO BE. WEIR CONSIDERS FAH'D LESS FANATICAL THAN FAISAL ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT AND ESPECIALLY ON THE QUESTION OF JERUSALEM. HE THINKS FAH'D IS SOPHISTICATED IN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS, DESCRIBING HIM AS "WELL CLUED IN" AND EVEN MORE SENSITIVE THAN FAISAL TO THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING SURE THAT WESTERN ECONOMIES ARE NOT JEOPARDIZED. HE QUOTED FAH'D AS SAYING THAT HE HAD WORKED HARD IN ALGIERS AGAINST AN INCREASE IN THE PRICE OF OIL, AND WEIR WAS DISPOSED TO TAKE HIM AT HIS WORD. WHEN ASKED WHETHER FAH'D WOULD GET ON WITH THE SHAH OF IRAN, WEIR SAID HE WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT FAH'D HAD INTENDED TO GO TO IRAQ AT THE END OF APRIL TO TALK TO THE IRAQIS ABOUT BORDER DISPUTES AND OTHER MATTERS. HE ALSO HAD INTENDED TO GO ON TO IRAN TO TALK TO THE SHAH. WEIR THOUGHT IT WAS STILL POSSIBLE THAT FAH'D MIGHT MAKE HIS VISITS TO IRAQ AND IRAN. IN WEIR'S OPINION FAH'D WAS THE MAN TO IMPROVE SAUDI-IRANIAN RELATIONS. WHERE
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FAISAL SHOWED NO INTEREST IN POLITICAL COOPERATION WITH IRAN, FAH'D SEEMED TO BE OF A DIFFERENT MIND. WEIR POINTED OUT THAT AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN FAH'D AND THE SHAH OF IRAN COULD HAVE ENORMOUS POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STABILITY OF THE GULF. WEIR SPECULATED THAT FAH'D, UNLIKE FAISAL, MIGHT BE MORE AMENABLE TO CONTACTS WITH THE SOVIET UNION, BUT HE WOULD OF COURSE HAVE TO PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO THE VIEWS OF HIS CONSERVA-

TIVE COLLEAGUES. AS TO FAH'D'S RELATIONS WITH YAMANI, WEIR PROFESSED NOT TO KNOW WHETHER THEY WERE GOOD OR BAD, AND WONDERED WHETHER WE HAD ANY DEFINITE INDICATIONS.

3. CONCLUDING, WEIR THOUGHT THAT THE BIGGEST DANGER TO THE WEST WOULD BE A SITUATION OF UNSTABILITY IN SAUDI ARABIA ITSELF. HE DID NOT SEEM TO THINK THAT THIS WAS IN PROSPECT AND IN FACT SUMMED UP HIS REMARKS TO US BY SAYING THAT IN THE NEAR TERM AT LEAST THE WEST COULD BE REASONABLY CONFIDENT. RICHARDSON

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